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JUNE 20, 2006

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U.S. DOORS OPEN FOR MORE REFUGEES ON WORLD REFUGEE DAY

U.S. resettlement goals outlined, as world
refugee numbers decline

By Charlene Porter
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – Refugees caught up in years, sometimes decades, of strife soon will be resettled in the United States, according to an announcement June 19 from the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

Officials made the announcement at a Washington press briefing in recognition of World Refugee Day, June 20.

Eight thousand Meskhetian Turks recently resettled in the United States, and 4,000 more are coming soon, said Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kelly Ryan. "This is a group of people that basically has had no home since the end of the Second World War," said Ryan. "So it's a very protracted situation, and we're very glad to welcome them to the United States."

Meskhetian Turks, a largely Muslim ethnic group, were deported by Josef Stalin from their native Georgia in 1944 to Uzbekistan. They encountered multiple displacements in the ensuing decades, and their status became further complicated by the break up of the Soviet Union. Many have integrated into other states of the Russian Federation but in a few areas they are denied citizenship and considered stateless.

Some 13,000 refugees from East Africa also will be resettled in the United States this year, Ryan said, notably groups displaced from Ethiopia, Burundi and Congo.

The United States will accept about 54,000 refugees for resettlement in 2006, officials said, more than any other country. Over the last 30 years, the United States has resettled 2.6 million refugees.

"The United States is by far our most valuable partner, resettling more refugees each year than all the other 18-or-so refugee resettlement countries combined," said Wendy Young, of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the world's foremost agency providing protection and support for people driven from their homelands.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

UNHCR is at the forefront of World Refugee Day commemorations, in 2006 focused on the theme, "Hope."

"It is also important that we not just think about refugees as victims, but that we also value their human capacity," said Young. "We need to support the strength of refugee communities and help them to rebuild their lives, their homes and their societies."

Young said the number of refugees under UNHCR care is now at its lowest point in a quarter century, down to 8.4 million, a decline of more than 1 million from 2004 to 2005. The decrease can be attributed to homeland returns for refugees in a number of world regions. More than 6 million have returned to their countries of origin in the last four years, notably in Afghanistan, Liberia, Burundi, Iraq and Angola.

A contrasting trend prohibits celebration of those figures, however. Young said the agency is concerned by increasing numbers of people known as "internally displaced persons." They are not considered refugees under international law if they have not crossed an international border. But violence, regional and religious conflicts have driven millions of people from their villages and towns to camps or other uncertain circumstances.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

UNHCR and the United States are working together to encourage other nations to increase support for this cause and open their borders to greater numbers of refugees.

"In Latin America we've seen a number of countries come forward to open the doors to resettlement," said Young. Ryan added the United States also is willing to help provide technical training, to guide other nations in the development of programs and support systems to give refugees a new start in a new country.

The United States recently admitted six refugees from North Korea for resettlement, the first time it has done so. Reporters probed Ryan for a forecast on whether this initiative will increase, but received few specifics. Ryan said the State Department is unwilling to outline the policy toward a broader resettlement of North Korean refugees at this time.

She did say that U.S. law might allow the admission of "hundreds, if not thousands," but gaining access to would-be refugees from North Korea to ascertain their suitability would be the larger problem.

Young said South Korea typically is able to offer long-term solutions to those fleeing North Korea, rather than have them resettle in a third country.

More information on the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration is available on the department Web site:

<http://www.state.gov/g/prm/>

BURMA'S AUNG SAN SUU KYI MARKS ANOTHER BIRTHDAY UNDER HOUSE ARREST

Burma's military junta has detained democracy leader since May 2003

By Jane Morse
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The U.S. Department of State marked the 61st birthday of Burma's democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, June 19 and called for her release from house arrest in a statement issued the same day.

The National League for Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi's political party, won in Burma's general elections in 1990, but the country's military junta refused to relinquish its power. The opposition leader and Nobel laureate has been detained at her residence in Burma's capital,

Rangoon, since May 2003 when the convoy in which she was riding was attacked by a junta-backed militia.

Although Burma's military leaders have kept Aung San Suu Kyi incommunicado, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said, "her message of non-violence and democracy continues to inspire those who yearn for freedom in Burma and throughout the world."

Aung San Suu Kyi is among more than 1,100 Burmese who have been imprisoned by the military regime for the peaceful expression of their political views, McCormack said.

These political prisoners include National League for Democracy Vice Chairman U Tin Oo, who remains under house arrest, and Hkun Htun Oo, leader of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, who is serving two life sentences plus 53 years in a remote prison.

Also imprisoned is journalist U Win Tin, who has been jailed since 1989; U Kyaw Min, a Muslim leader elected to Parliament in 1990, who is currently serving a 47-year sentence for allegedly violating immigration laws; and Aye Myint, who is serving a seven-year sentence for providing advice to farmers whose land had been confiscated by the military.

"It is long past time to redress these and other injustices," McCormack said. "The United States reiterates its call on the Burmese regime to release these and all political prisoners and initiate the genuine dialogue with all elements of political life needed to bring about true national reconciliation."

According to a White House statement released the same day, "Aung San Suu Kyi's courage and fortitude are an inspiration to those who seek freedom and justice in all parts of the world."

"The United States urges the international community and the United Nations to take up its responsibility to address the plight of the Burmese people and the need for an inclusive, genuine political dialogue in Burma," the statement said.

See also, "United States To Seek U.N. Security Council Resolution on Burma.":

http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/burma.html

IRAN'S LEADERS SHOULD VIEW NUCLEAR OFFER AS "HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY"

Bush says a nuclear-armed Iran would present a "grave threat" to everyone

Washington -- President Bush urged the Iranian government to accept what he termed a "reasonable offer" from the United States and the international community that would give Iran positive incentives in return for halting its uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities.

Speaking in his commencement address at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York, June 19, Bush said the "unified approach" presented by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany, offers Iran's leaders "an historic opportunity to set their country on a better course."

Accepting the offer will help Iran achieve peace, prosperity and a more hopeful future for its people. It would require Iran to abandon any ambitions to obtain nuclear weapons, and to come into compliance with international obligations.

"Iran's leaders have a clear choice," Bush said. "We hope they will accept our offer and voluntarily suspend these activities, so we can work out an agreement that will bring Iran real benefits."

However, he added that if the offer is rejected, "it will result in action before the Security Council, further isolation from the world, and progressively stronger political and economic sanctions."

The president described the behavior of Iran's regime as "one of the most difficult challenges facing the world today," not only because of its nuclear activities, but also for sponsoring terrorism, its denial of liberty and human rights to the Iranian people, and its threats to destroy Israel.

Bush said he wanted the Iranian people to know that the United States respects them and their country, as well as their "legitimate desire" for civilian nuclear energy.

"We believe the Iranian people should enjoy the benefits of a truly peaceful program to use nuclear reactors to generate electric power. So America supports the Iranian people's rights to develop nuclear energy peacefully, with proper international safeguards," he said.

Bush said the United States is providing more than \$75 million in 2006 “to promote openness and freedom for the Iranian people,” and is looking for new ways to increase contacts between Americans and Iranians “especially in education and culture, sports and tourism.” He said the Iranian people “want and deserve an opportunity to determine their own future, an economy that rewards their intelligence and talents, and a society that allows them to pursue their dreams,” and said they would thrive if given more opportunities to travel, study and do business around the world.

“We look forward to the day when our nations are friends, and when the people of Iran enjoy the full fruits of liberty, and play a leading role to establish peace in our world,” Bush said.

The president also highlighted cooperation between the United States and the European Union ahead of the U.S.-EU Summit which will be held in Vienna, Austria, June 21.

A transcript of the president’s remarks is available on the White House Web site: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/06/20060619-1.html>

AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT CAN PROVIDE MODEL FOR ROMA

Experts brief U.S. Commission on plight of Europe’s largest minority

By Jeffrey Thomas
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- In overcoming the legacy of racism, discrimination and social exclusion facing its large Roma population, Europe could learn from the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, an expert witness said at a briefing for the U.S. Helsinki Commission June 16.

“I don’t think that Europe for the time being realizes the depth of the racism and the racist attitudes in its structures,” said Nicolae Gheorghe, a senior advisor with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR).

Roma “need to learn from ... the African American movement in the United States how to organize politically, how to enter into political parties, how to be candidates, voters, elected officers, and ... to try to change the status quo,” Gheorghe told the Commission, an independent agency of the U.S. government that monitors human rights.

Gheorghe, who presented himself as belonging to an older generation than the other witnesses, reported that great progress has been achieved on Roma issues. But he believes his generation erred in taking the status quo for granted. “We need to address the racist attitudes in our society and the institutions that perpetuate them,” he said.

“Racism and discrimination against Roma and Sinti has been on the rise in the last decade,” Gheorghe said, noting that this has happened despite OSCE attempts to assist national minorities such as the action plan on Roma and Sinti adopted by the OSCE at the Maastricht ministerial in December 2003.

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN BULGARIA

Also briefing at the hearing, Tano Bechev, the program director at the Regional Policy Development Centre in Sofia, Bulgaria, described successful school desegregation projects in Bulgaria that he said provide real hope for the future.

Romani children have often been relegated to separate schools that have led to a cycle of high dropout rates, low educational achievement and social exclusion, Bechev said. But desegregation initiatives in Bulgaria have demonstrated that Romani parents will agree to their children enrolling in better schools in non-Romani neighborhoods and that those schools can provide a supportive environment largely free of racial harassment.

“With adequate academic support, most of the Romani children reached the level of their non-Romani peers and by the end of the first year had success comparable to that of non-Romani children,” Bechev said.

He said the Bulgarian experience could be replicated in countries such as Romania and Slovakia if principles of the Bulgarian model were respected: Romani organizations must take the lead in carrying out desegregation activities to build trust among Romani parents; non-Romani parents, teachers and children have to be involved in activities that challenge the stereotypes against Roma;

and Romani children moving to integrated schools must be provided with continuous support.

In Bechev's view, desegregation is the only strategy that "makes a difference – the difference between good education and inferior education; the difference between life with dignity and life in humiliation; and finally, the difference between equality and inequality."

Roma were once disparagingly referred to as "gypsies." With a European population estimated at between 8 and 12 million, they face a wide range of problems. In the nations that have emerged from the former Yugoslavia, they often live stateless and as refugees or internally displaced persons. In the European Union, they are overrepresented in the underclass and face discrimination in housing and education despite good faith efforts by central governments to improve their situation, the witnesses said.

Nine countries – Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and Slovakia – are participating in the "Decade of Roma Inclusion," an initiative by the Open Society Institute and the World Bank in which each country sets out concrete policies and measures to improve the living conditions of Roma.

OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES

Another witness, Timea Junghaus, an art historian and cultural activist affiliated with the Open Society Institute's Arts and Culture Network Program in Budapest, Hungary, focused on the need to recognize and acknowledge a positive Roma cultural identity rather than the stereotypes the majority culture generally superimposes on its largest minority.

Europe's majority cultures exclude the literature, music, visual and performing art of the Roma communities, said Junghaus, who added, "the Roma do not have the opportunity for self-representation, cannot fight stereotypes and discrimination. Having the space, equipment and support for cultural practice is not a luxury. It is a basic human right."

The OSCE action plan on Roma and Sinti, which suggests ways to fight discrimination and racism, is available on the OSCE Web site in English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish.

Pleases Note: Most texts and transcript mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

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